

IN THIS EDITION:

Local • Outdoors • Sports • TV

\$1.50

QUICK HITS

Good Day Wish To A Subscriber

A special good day to Herald subscribers Jerry and Mary Kincaid of Baker City.

Local, 3A

Baker County's rate of new COVID-19 cases over the six-day period ending Thursday, Jan. 21, was the slowest in almost three months.

The county reported 12 new cases for the period Jan. 16-21. The daily totals were two, zero, three, two, four and one.

The county hasn't had a six-day period with fewer new virus cases since Oct. 18-23, when there were two positive tests.

Since then, however, the county has averaged about 32 new cases every six days.

BRIEFING

Blood drive fully booked, but donors can get on waiting list

The American Red Cross is sponsoring a blood drive on Jan. 25 from noon to 6 p.m. in the Fellowship Hall at the Nazarene Church, 1250 Hughes Lane in Baker City. Although all appointments are booked, donors can be placed on a waiting list, in case of cancellations, by calling Myrna Evans at 541-523-5368.

WEATHER

Today

36 / 17

Sunny

Sunday

34 / 26

Snow late

Monday

37 / 18

Cloudy

The space below is for a postage label for issues that are mailed.

BHS grad rate at 92%

By Chris Collins
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The 2019-20 Baker High School graduation rate jumped from 78.6% a year ago to 92% this year, according to numbers released Thursday, Jan. 21, by the Oregon Department of Education.

And although Greg Mitchell, BHS principal, is happy with that rate, he believes it should be at least 2 percentage points higher. (Last year's numbers were lower than he expected as well, based on factors not accounted for by the Oregon Department of Education, he said Thursday.)

This year's graduation rate was increased from about 90% earlier to the current number released Thursday after discussions with ODE, Mitchell said. Still, he was disappointed that the rate wasn't increased more.

The discrepancy is attributed to students who graduated elsewhere and foreign exchange students who should not have been calculated in the total, Mitchell said.

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Mitchell

J.R. Simplot Company Fertilizer Storage, Distribution Plant Under Construction



Lisa Britton/For the Baker City Herald

Crews are building a fertilizer storage and distribution facility for the J.R. Simplot Company in Baker City.

Fertilizer Facility

By Jayson Jacoby
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Construction crews are building a liquid fertilizer storage and distribution facility in Baker City's industrial park that is slated to open early this spring.

The Simplot Grower Solutions operation will employ seven people initially, with the potential to increase to about a dozen workers, Josh Jordan, senior manager for communications and public relations for the J.R. Simplot Company, wrote in an email to the Herald.

The Idaho company bought a 14.28-acre parcel from Baker City in the city's 64-acre Elkhorn View Industrial Park at the northwest corner of the city.

Simplot paid \$235,620 for the property, which is west of 17th Street and south of Pocatontas Road. The parcel is just south of the Behlen Mfg. Co.'s livestock equipment factory.

In his email, Jordan wrote that

Simplot has operated a temporary Simplot Grower Solutions facility in Baker City. It is near the railroad tracks north of Broadway Street.

The facility under construction is "part of a longer-term plan to build a permanent facility to meet the needs of area farmers, many of whom grow potatoes that we use at our processing facilities," Jordan wrote.

The Baker City facility will not produce fertilizer.

Simplot has two main production plants, one in Pocatello, Idaho, and one in Rock Springs, Wyoming, that supply the company's more than 200 Grower Solutions stores, Jordan wrote in his email.

Jordan wrote that the Baker City business, in addition to selling fertilizer mixes to customers' specifications, will offer other crop products, crop advisers and other services to local farmers.

"The facility will have 2,300 tons of capacity and enhanced capabilities to

blend a variety of applications more quickly and efficiently. It will also include a new truck scale and offer some enhanced services all aimed at doing more to serve growers," Jordan wrote.

Future plans include a business office, shop and railroad spur, he wrote.

In February 2020 the Baker City Planning Commission approved Simplot's request for a waiver from the 50-foot height limit in the city's zoning ordinance to accommodate a fertilizer storage tower that will be about 75 feet high initially and could be added to. The conditional-use permit allows a structure as tall as 85 feet.

During a Baker City Council meeting in November 2019, when councilors agreed to sell the parcel to Simplot, Councilor Lynette Perry raised concerns about the plant emitting odors.

Paul Simpson, an operations manager for the company, said the facility will not produce smells or smoke.

Voters to decide on \$4 million school bond

By Chris Collins
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Thumbs up was the signal sent to Superintendent Mark Witty who sought a consensus from the five Baker School Board members about whether they still want to seek voter approval of a \$4 million school improvement bond in May.

During a work session Thursday night, director Kevin Cassidy said he has concerns about the timing of the vote given the coronavirus pandemic and community sentiment about raising taxes at a time when many businesses are having trouble surviving.

See **Bond** / Page 5A

County to hire new deputy

By Samantha O'Conner
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Baker County commissioners have agreed to spend about \$7,300 so Sheriff Travis Ash can hire a new full-time deputy and ensure the county doesn't have to turn down potentially tens of thousands of dollars in grants.

Commissioners approved Ash's request during their Wednesday, Jan. 20, meeting.

See **Deputy** / Page 3A

Historic cabin survives ... again

■ Peavy Cabin, built in 1934 in the Elkhorn Mountains, has endured a massive forest fire, a fallen tree and, most recently, an interior blaze

By Jayson Jacoby
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Peavy Cabin is a survivor.

Over the 87 years the log structure has stood beside the North Fork of the John Day River west of Baker City, the cabin has emerged unscathed from one of the bigger wildfires in the Elkhorn Mountains in more than a century.

It shrugged off a tree that toppled onto its roof.

Peavy Cabin's most recent threat, though, just before Hal-

loween 2020, came from inside rather than outside.

And if not for a handy garden sprayer, the historic one-room building might finally have succumbed.

Three hunters were staying in the cabin the night of Oct. 27, said Jay Moore, recreation specialist for the Wallowa-Whitman National Forest.

Two other members from the group were staying in an RV parked outside.

The trio, who had kindled a

blaze in the cabin's freestanding woodstove (there is also a fire-place on the opposite side of the single room) to ward off temperatures that dipped into the teens, awakened in the night to see flames on the ceiling, Moore said.

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U.S. Forest Service/ Contributed Photo

Peavy Cabin, built in 1934, survived a fire that started inside the log structure in late October.

